



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 6 April 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
6 APRIL, 1968

1. Vietnam

While military activity in South Vietnam remains relatively light, we have gotten scattered and very tenuous indications in intercepts that the Communists are modifying their tactics. Specifically:

--At least one artillery unit near the Demilitarized Zone was ordered on 3 April to suspend firing.

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These fragments may reflect nothing but local tactical situations, but they may also be related to the current peace proposals.

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In Saigon, meanwhile,

the prospect of negotiations has brought Thieu and Ky closer together than ever before.

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The South Vietnamese are totally unprepared for negotiations, however

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Correction to Item 3

Japan

Foreign Minister Miki told Ambassador Johnson today that press reports of the ministerial mission to Washington were erroneous.

Miki says that he and Sato have agreed they will not make any moves on this score until they have had further talks with the ambassador.

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2. South Korea

Leaders in both South Korea and Japan are worried that the US may pull back from its involvement in the Far East.

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3. Japan

Japanese Prime Minister Sato is also worried--so much so that his government announced today that it would "soon" send a cabinet-level emissary to the US. The Japanese still tend to believe that the President's renunciation of his candidacy must be a confession of responsibility for a mistaken policy in Vietnam, and they feel left out on a limb by the policy shift they see in his 31 March proposal.

4. Cambodia

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5. Panama

Just before the Supreme Court ruled against Robles, Arias talked [redacted] about signs that his allies in the oligarchy were deserting him. He acknowledged he had been talking with "leftists" and said they seemed to be the only people who might help him "fight the National Guard and if necessary the US which was supporting the Guard." He said he would go into the hills rather than compromise with Robles.

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[redacted] Arias may have been talking for effect but that he sounded sincere. There is supposed to be a demonstration at Arias' party headquarters today.

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6. Czechoslovakia

The new leaders are trying to smoke out Free World capitals on the prospects for economic assistance. They are investigating private as well as governmental sources in the West and are considering renewed active membership in the International Monetary Fund.

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A switch to the West for economic aid could cause problems with Prague's allies. The country would be hurt badly, at least in the short term, if the USSR undertook economic reprisals.

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7. Soviet Union

The Soviets may launch a moon probe today--the first such attempt since an abortive shot in early February.

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8. Canada

Justice Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau is the favorite as the Liberal Party meets today to select a successor to Prime Minister Pearson. As prime minister, the flamboyant Trudeau would probably change the style but not the substance of Pearson's policies.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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6 April 1968

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

6 April 1968

I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Peking Warns Hanoi Against Negotiations: Peking's news agency has released a Chinese statement entitled "Johnson Plays New Tricks of Inducing Peace Talks by Partial Suspension of Bombing." Peking is thus reiterating its standard warning against a US "fraud" designed to win in negotiations what cannot be achieved by military means. The Chinese have been setting the stage for the latest statement by repeatedly broadcasting Mao's quotation that "by persevering in protracted war, the Vietnamese people will surely drive the US aggressors out of their country."

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Hanoi Blasts US Again: Hanoi has offered another strong criticism of what it terms the "limited US bombing halt" and has spelled out in some detail what it considers the "other acts of war" being committed by the US against North Vietnam. In a lengthy and authoritative "Commentator" article in the party daily, Nhan Dan, of 5 April, it claimed that despite the partial halt, the US was continuing to attach conditions to its peace offers and was "dead set" about pursuing "its aggressive design." The statement pointed out that despite the limitation of the bombing, the US was intensifying the war in the South as well as mounting record raids against populated areas of the country.

The "Commentator" article also stressed that the US had no right to commit any act against North Vietnam. It demanded that, in addition to an unconditional halt to the bombing throughout the whole of North Vietnam, the US also stop its "other acts of war." These, it claimed, include the use of reconnaissance aircraft and naval patrol craft as well as dropping leaflets and gifts, airdropping commandos or smuggling them from Laotian territory, and using artillery based in South Vietnam to bombard territory north of the Demilitarized Zone.

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Hanoi Foreign Ministry Statement Protests US Bombing: The North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry has joined the regime's propaganda campaign to pressure the US into a full bombing halt. In a statement broadcast on 5 April, it took the same line as earlier propaganda pronouncements in condemning the "limited" bombing halt and in pointing out that the regions still subject to bombing contain populated areas. The statement also denounced the US for continuing aerial reconnaissance and for sending its "warships" into North Vietnamese coastal waters. The statement closed by reiterating Hanoi's demand that the US stop "permanently and unconditionally" the bombing and all other acts of war in the whole of North Vietnam.

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Liberation Front on Hanoi's Statement of 3 April: In its first original commentary on the new US - North Vietnamese peace dialogue, the Liberation Front ignored the fact that both sides have agreed to meet for "pretalk" talks. The Front had already rebroadcast the full text of Hanoi's response to President Johnson's speech, but it did so without comment. In its new commentary on 4 April, the Front treated the Hanoi statement as a rededication of Communist efforts to win a military victory without any reference to Hanoi's offer to meet with US representatives.

The entire lengthy commentary is a strong condemnation of President Johnson's speech as a trick and as an admission that the US has suffered a military defeat in South Vietnam. It calls the Hanoi reply an "eloquent" answer to the "cunning and deceitful arguments" of the US President and implies that the main thrust of Hanoi's answer was a tough reaffirmation of Ho Chi Minh's call to continue the fighting until Communist objectives have been won.

This kind of approach is not unusual for the Front, which almost always reflects a much harder line on negotiations than Hanoi does. On the other hand, the fact that the complete text of the Hanoi offer was broadcast by the Front indicates that there is no effort on the part of the Front to misrepresent the Hanoi position or to keep the South Vietnamese Communists in the dark about current developments.

It probably does represent an effort on the part of the Front to interpret these developments as making little or no change in accepted Communist positions.

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Hanoi's Propaganda on Fighting in the South:
Despite the relative lull in the fighting in South Vietnam, Hanoi's propaganda on 4 and 5 April seemed to take particular pains to make the point that Communist forces are continuing to inflict serious losses on allied units. A broadcast wrapping up events during the last week of March focused on allied "defeats" in the northern provinces. Other statements on 4 and 5 April dwelt on events around Khe Sanh. Despite the fact that fighting has actually been relatively light in the area, both statements described heavy fighting, large numbers of allied casualties, and panic in the ranks of the allied forces.

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Laotian Leader Thinks Hanoi Has Made a Major Retreat: Premier Souvanna told Ambassador Sullivan yesterday that he considers Hanoi's statement of 3 April to be a "major retreat from its previous adamant position about talks." He said that Hanoi has, in effect, finally conceded its willingness to negotiate while bombing continues. This, he admitted, had surprised him. He thinks there were two main reasons for Hanoi's unexpected move: (1) President Johnson had scored a major psychological advantage by withdrawing from the presidential race; and (2) Hanoi is probably really hurting badly and needs peace.

Souvanna said he was sure that "all other Orientals" would interpret Hanoi's move the way he does and see it as a loss of face.

The Laotian leader said he "assumed" that the Soviets had played some role in getting Hanoi to react favorably to the President's 31 March speech.

Finally, Souvanna said he is gratified that Averell Harriman will be the US negotiator because this "assures that Laos will not be forgotten."

Views of Soviet Ambassador in Vientiane: Sullivan also talked yesterday with his Soviet counterpart, who said with apparent sincerity that he was sure Hanoi's response to the President's proposals was unconditional and genuine, rather than a tactical delaying action. He told Sullivan that he thought Hanoi would attach more importance to the make-up of the respective negotiating teams than to a good many substantive questions.

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The Paul Doumer Bridge: [redacted]

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[redacted] as of late last week the Paul Doumer Bridge was still not being repaired. However, material for getting the bridge back into service was being stockpiled on its approaches.

[redacted] work is to get under way on the bridge soon and that it is expected to be open for rail traffic in a month. Soviet helicopters, he said, are to be used to lift new bridge sections into place.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report at
this time.

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